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A FEDERAL GERMANY?

By Alexander Boeker

A series of inspired stories has recently indicated that the Governments of the United States and Great Britain are contemplating the creation of a loosely federalized Germany, in contrast with the universal trend toward greater centralization of governmental powers. Details of these plans have not yet been revealed officially, but enough has leaked out to permit preliminary evaluation.

The chorus of approval emanating from American commentators and columnists -- British comments have been more guarded -- indicates that "decentralization" of Germany may become the latest fad and cure-all, rivaling last year's "de-industrialization".

This tendency has been particularly noticeable since Walter Lippmann, the Pontifex Maximus of American journalism, returned from Europe and stated that Russia and Britain, in anticipation of another war, were developing their zones in Germany into bulwarks against each other. Mr. Lippmann concluded -- inspired, it is said, by General de Gaulle -- that the only way to prevent a Third World War is to turn Germany into a Federation of States, sufficiently loose to be useless as an outpost for either Russian or British power.

The suggestion of a tenuous federation of some 10 to 15 German States has been welcomed by many as an escape from the impasse of inter-Allied rivalry over the control of Germany. It is argued that this solution might help eventually to bridge the gap now rapidly developing between the democratized Western zones of occupation and the sovietized Russian zone. At worst, it is said, it could be made to work without Russia. This argument in itself is an admission of the total failure of Allied statesmanship in the treatment of Germany. The complete elimination of Germany as a power factor, through Unconditional Surrender, has finally resulted in the head-on clash of the victorious nations, which many had foreseen. It is at least doubtful whether the federalization proposal will mitigate this clash.

If disappointment, similar to that which so quickly followed the

Morgenthau de-industrialization plan, is to be avoided, the federalization program should be examined critically while there is still time.

In the first place, decentralization implies the existence of government whose structure is to be loosened. In fact, however, the German State is today an entity only on paper. Politically and economically it has reached a stage of dissolution exceeding even that of the Germanic Confederation, which followed the Napoleonic Wars. The problem, therefore, is not how this body should be further dismembered but whether, to what extent, and in what form it should be re-integrated.

II

The creation of a federal Germany is advocated on a variety of grounds. Some, fearing Soviet control, centrally exercised from Berlin, see in it a device to keep Soviet influence out of the Western half of the country. Others, desirous of speeding the formation of a Western bloc, view federalization as a compromise formula between French desire to detach the Rhineland and the Ruhr and British opposition to that dismemberment. Those who are still in a state of Prusso-phobia, rather than Russophobia, regard federalization as a safeguard against the unlikely contingency of future German aggression.

Thinking on this subject would be much clearer if we distinguished sharply between interim device and long-range objective.

As a transitional solution, the federal plan would permit the early establishment of interzonal administrative and policy-making organs. It would speed the transfer of intricate administrative mechanisms from an inevitably clumsy military machine to more competent civilian hands. It would perhaps temporarily check the growth of Communist influence in the West. It might -- and this could be its most beneficial feature -- reconcile all but the most intransigent French opinion to the retention of the Rhine and Ruhr within the body politic of Germany, thus eliminating the danger of a hopeless split within Western Europe.

Russia has already unmistakably indicated through its press and radio that it is opposed to the federal organization of Germany. Russian opposition, stripped of camouflage, is based on the supposition that a federal structure will impede the Westward spread of Communism and might lead to the incorporation of the industrial heart of Germany into a Western bloc.

It is clear, therefore, that the federal proposal, far from healing the breach between Russia and the Western Powers, is likely to accentuate that calamity. The decentralization plan will almost certainly heighten

Moscow's determination to integrate the Eastern half of Germany into its sphere, and to use the German desire for national unity as leverage to combat Anglo-American influence in the Western zones.

III

As a long-range objective, the value of a federal reorganization of Germany depends wholly on the distribution of power between Central Governments and Federal States.

Much ill-informed comment has lately appeared concerning the supposedly over-centralized character of the Bismarck and Weimar Constitutions. As a matter of fact, the Bismarckian Reich started out by severely limiting the Central Government's powers, and became more centralized only as a result of democratic pressures. The Reichstag championed national unity; the Princes were the defenders of States' Rights. In the Weimar Republic, every State had its separate parliament and its separate police power, as in the American Union. Germany had, except for Switzerland, the least centralized of all European national governments. Extreme centralization set in only under Hitler.

We need not, therefore, go too far back in history to find guidance for the reconstruction of Germany. The Weimar Republic itself intended to destroy the preponderance of the Prussian State and to reconstitute its component parts as separate provinces within the Reich. American policy-framers could do worse than to study these proposals of 1928 and 1929.

A German Customs Union as the only link between a dozen German States, suggested recently by Mr. Sumner Welles, would inevitably tend back toward a unitary government, as did the Zollverein in the early Nineteenth Century, which paved the way for the political unification of 1871. A successful customs union would require wide powers of legislation in the fields of industry, agriculture and labor. It would have to control fiscal policies internally as well as externally. Economic and political policies cannot be permanently divorced.

Through defeat and dissolution Germany salvaged a unified legal system, the work of generations of its best minds. A central judicial power will be required to maintain this unity. The alternative is Balkanization. A uniform de-nazification policy can be carried out only if certain police powers reside with the Central Government.

Emphasis on integration, as well as on decentralization, is demanded by common sense and good statesmanship. The test case is location of

the control of foreign policy.

IV

The cataclysmic events of the last few years have made certain that Germany's political structure will never again be what it was.

For six centuries, two Eastern German States, Austria and Prussia, successively maintained German unity by using their superior strength to keep the smaller States in line. Now Austria has been excluded once more from the German community by the verdict of the victors. The annihilation of Prussia is without parallel in modern history. Its most historic provinces have been divided up between Soviet Russia and Soviet Poland, the inhabitants expelled from their homes. Their fate is comparable only to that of the Armenians under the Turks, or the Jews under Hitler. The haters of Prussia have truly had their day of revenge. Those who continue to bait Prussia are beating a corpse.

The Western provinces of Prussia, more recently acquired, -- the Rhineland, Westphalia, Hanover, etc. -- are likely to re-emerge from the catastrophe as separate units, under a central German Government.

There will no longer be one dominating German State within the Reich. The new Germany, unless reorganized under Soviet totalitarian auspices, will therefore be an association of equals. France, freed from fear of Prussia, may well modify its policies toward Germany.

Most Germans will welcome this development. But most Germans will also be passionately opposed to the destruction of national unity and the detachment of historic provinces. Generations of German school children have learned that for centuries the development of their country was gravely hampered by the lack of a sufficiently strong Central Government. No Allied textbooks can eradicate this lesson of history.

In the long run, no plan for the future of Germany will be workable unless it has the free consent of the German people. The Soviet leaders have shown keen appreciation of this. With notable political foresight they have instructed the German Communist Party to make "national unity" one of its principal rallying cries.

On June 18, the Russian press prominently featured an article on the plans for a federal Germany in which it was said:

"Do they (Britain and the United States) intend to give any attention to the opinion of the German people, or do they intend to impose upon Germany an alien will in this most fundamental question of her national existence?"

No German can have read this sentence without a quickening of the heart. And no American or British statesman can afford to overlook the portent which it carries.

By Frank C. Hanighen

July 10, 1946

The Administration, in its stand on OPA, has displayed that dangerous arrogance which exposed the heroes of classical mythology to the displeasure of the gods. Truman vetoed the compromise OPA bill submitted to him by Congress, and then took a stubborn stand for passage of another bill which would substantially restore the former status of OPA. By this policy the President has risked a not inconsiderable part of his dwindling political capital. He has also endangered the political chances of Democratic Senators and Congressmen in next fall's elections.

Indeed Mr. Truman would hardly win a popularity contest on Capitol Hill. It can be revealed that Senate Majority Leader Barkley received assurance from the President that the compromise OPA bill would be signed. Then the President vetoed it. Later Truman promised Barkley that he would support a substitute bill, sans the Taft and Wherry amendments. Barkley therefore pushed the substitute OPA measure through the Banking Committee. But Mr. Paul Porter, head of OPA, appeared on the Hill and indicated that it was not certain whether or not the President would accept even this bill. The fury of "Dear Alben" Barkley, who had once revolted against similar treatment from President Roosevelt, can well be imagined. The White House-Congress honeymoon is long over. It remains to be seen whether it will end in divorce.

The President is apparently gambling on the possibility that popular resentment inspired by rising prices will rebound on Congress, if they fail to pass an acceptable OPA bill; and that his prestige will increase, if Congress yields to his demands for such a bill. But there is good reason for wondering if he has not miscalculated. Several members of Congress say that they have received comparatively few letters about the OPA dispute from constituents; and that among these few, the voters' opinions are about evenly divided. Certainly the "runaway inflation" forecasted by Bowles and Truman has as yet proved the most insubstantial of phantoms. The Stock Market hardly moved. While commodity prices rose sharply, some as quietly dropped back from their highs. As to durable consumers' goods, there has been no sign of a rise, and it is indicated that any increase in prices will be very small. At present, there seems to be an even chance that the whole OPA affair may prove to be "much ado about nothing". But even if popular discontent with prices takes political form, it will probably fall as heavily on the Executive as on the Legislative branch; and on Democrats as much as on Republicans.

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Almost daily, dependent on the persuasiveness of Mr. Byrnes and the unpublished instructions to Mr. Molotov from Moscow, the political barometer at the latest Big Four meeting in Paris has swung from fair to stormy and back again. The gyrations have tended to conceal one very important fact. The preliminary Peace Conference, announced last December for a date "not later than May 1, 1946", has been steadily postponed. Now it is expected to convene at the end of July. Those three months -- even without further delay -- will have been very useful to Stalin in consolidating Russian gains. "Possession is nine points of the law", the more so when you can postpone the drafting of treaties while you are steadily "proving-up" squatter's rights.

Early jubilation over the compromise on Trieste has given place to a realization that Russia, on that issue, won a diplomatic victory likely to prove dangerous to world peace. The Big Four agreed to internationalize a portion of Venezia Giulia (including the city of Trieste) and place it under the rule of the Security Council. But there is not the slightest reason for believing that the Council, in view of its

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record, can administer that area without risk of complications through use of the veto.

It is recalled that Bismarck by a similar diplomatic stroke won an important bargaining position which he well exploited in the interests of German imperialism. In 1876, the Iron Chancellor got Germany a seat on an international body controlling the financial situation in Egypt, which had defaulted on its bonds. Germany's financial stake in Egypt was small. But on the international body, Bismarck systematically threatened to block measures which Britain wanted and only yielded when Britain and other Powers agreed to recognition of German imperialist rights elsewhere in the world. Trieste may prove as useful to Stalin as Egypt was to Bismarck.

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The cat chorus over the Palestine problem is becoming shriller. The Arab League sneers at President Truman, asking why he does not encourage the Jewish victims of persecution to immigrate to the United States. Some Jewish elements in the United States seek revenge on Britain by opposing the British loan. Other American Jews oppose their wrathful brethren and advocate the loan while deploring the British position in Palestine. The President meanwhile is presumably waiting for the report on this contentious question from his recently appointed committee.

But will he be content to wait? Some Capitol observers wonder if his own declining political fortunes may prompt the President to act on behalf of the Zionists. American intervention into the increasingly delicate situation in the Near East and Moslem world, which has arisen from the Palestine situation, might well prove very risky. But Mr. Truman is not incapable of rash political moves. His veto of the OPA is widely viewed as "reckless". He obviously sought to retain his hold on Labor and the Democratic Left, no matter what the result on our economy. If this maneuver fails he may seek to salvage for the Democratic Party another aggregation of voters out of the Palestine imbroglio, disregarding the cost in international friction.

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The renewed campaign in the press in favor of keeping atomic bomb secrets is said to have been inspired by Mr. Baruch himself. Mr. Baruch was quite sincere in his offer to share atomic knowledge and to control manufacture on condition that the Atomic Commission be administered by majority rule (with no veto) and that inspection be world-wide. But he apparently fears that there are still appeasement elements in the Administration inclined to compromise the official position. Few men are in a better position to know.

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Popular feeling in Poland against Russia and the puppet government in Warsaw has greatly increased, according to reliable sources, and has led to widespread clashes between Government and Resistance forces. It is believed that the pogroms at Kielce were not primarily anti-Semitic; they were directed not at Jews, as such, but at Communist and pro-Russian elements which included Jews. The Government, it is said, labelled them "anti-Semitic" in order to conceal their real character. Opinion among observers who know Poland well is divided as to whether these disorders will spread until Poland is actually in a state of widespread revolt against the authorities; or whether the present violent incidents are isolated occurrences, merely symptomatic of unrest. In any case, it is agreed that serious trouble is all too probable.

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There is a well-known painting, by William Gropper of the New Masses, satirizing Congress. It depicts one fat figure, arms lifted in oratorical gesture, standing on the almost deserted floor of Congress. The scene, as a matter of fact, is

familiar to those who sit in the Senate or House galleries. But what visitors do not realize is that the members who are absent from the floor are not dozing in their offices, or attending ball games. They are, most of them, working very hard in Committee rooms -- too many Committee rooms. Members sit on so many Committees (if they did not, constituents would criticize them for being lazy) that they have to run, not walk, from one Committee room to another. The La Follette-Monroney "streamlining Congress" bill is designed to remedy this situation.

That bill passed the Senate, thanks to the parliamentary strategy of Senator La Follette. He achieved this victory by making a concession to those southern Senators who are patronage-minded (they wanted to keep the power to appoint Senate employees) instead of delegating this power to a non-political secretary. La Follette conceded this and the bill passed. But the substance of his reformation of the committee system -- by limiting the number of committees, etc. -- remained in the bill.

The measure now faces much the same hurdle in the House of Representatives. It is bogged down in the Rules Committee and is said to have earned the opposition of Speaker Sam Rayburn. Congressman Monroney (Okla.) is responsible for guiding the legislation through the Lower House. Those interested in Congressional reform hope that Monroney will take a leaf out of La Follette's book and make the same concession in return for passage of the bill. It would be a net gain.

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The State Department in its policy towards Argentina continues to learn nothing and forget nothing. U. S. Ambassador Messersmith, at a dinner in Buenos Aires last week, took occasion to differ with the emphasis on "sovereignty" strongly expressed by President Perón in a recent speech. Argentine Foreign Minister Bramuglia followed up Messersmith's discourse with a re-assertion of Perón's ideas on sovereignty. It was hardly a harmonious program. Meanwhile the State Department presses the Argentine Government to hasten the expulsion of a number of reputed Nazis. No one denies that there are some Nazis in Argentina, but experts doubt that they are any great menace to inter-American peace. Argentina continues to stand on its rights in insisting that due process of law must be followed in proceedings for deportation of Nazis. It is asserted that actually there are fewer Nazis at liberty in Argentina than there are in Brazil. But the State Department makes no conspicuous demands on Rio.

That the State Department attitude has had a very bad effect on United States prestige throughout Latin America is confirmed by observers just returned from a tour of the southern republics. Many fear that "it may be our turn next to brave the wrath of the Colossus of the North". Those in various republics who are sincerely devoted to democracy feel apprehensive about Perón's efforts to create an Argentine bloc. Last week, the Uruguayan Government suppressed an incipient rebellion, rumored to have been inspired by elements in Buenos Aires. Obviously Perón would prefer a "friendly" government on his northeastern border in place of the democratic regime which has existed in Montevideo as a challenge to his totalitarian tendencies.

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Apart from the fate of Congressman May in the current cause célèbre, shrewd political observers are interested in the fact that Senator Mead heads the Committee investigating May. "Making public the charges against May at this time is a good publicity build-up for Mead's candidacy for the Governorship of New York", they remark.

Notes and Quotes

"As the atom bomb sounds its warning of doom, it is salutary to remember that it is not such a terrifying specter to people who do not care whether they live or die", wrote Anne O'Hare McCormick in the New York Times on July 1. The next day we received a copy of a letter from an inhabitant of a small city in the British zone of Germany -- a pitiful human document, confirming Mrs. McCormick's almost incredible statement. "Generally speaking, nobody has a hope for a better future, because the reconstruction goes too slowly. The best thing for all of us would be the atom bomb, that would be a quick ending of the endless suffering and starving slowly. Going to bed hungry, awakening at night of hunger, getting up hungry day by day; that makes you indifferent to all things around. We are directly waiting for the atom bomb, that would be the best solution.

"We have had scarce food during the war, and now, after the end, we are really starving, when there is no more war. That is too much. I reduced to 90 lbs. whereas I had 145 lbs. before. We are getting small like Lilliputians. You cannot imagine what the hunger means to all of us. People are cross to each other, ill-mannered, sick. If you could manage send us a Liebesgaben package, especially with lard, flour, or little cookies or oil, chocolate. In Berlin, people are dying like flies, because it is still worse than here. Only working people receive food tickets, which enable them a quite modest living, whereas elderly people, who cannot work any more get the minimal set of food tickets."

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A disillusioned trade union leader, Morris Muster, has well presented the case against the Communists in the Labor movement, on the occasion of his resignation as President of the United Furniture Workers of America, CIO. Accusing that union's executive board of being dominated by Communists and charging the Communists with insisting on protracted strikes when quick settlements could be effected amicably, Mr. Muster said:

"People belong to a trade union movement because they are workers and not professional politicians, but Communists are professional politicians first and trade unionists incidentally. In this particular situation, of the 130 delegates at the convention in Detroit, there were ten or twelve who never saw the inside of a furniture factory but wormed their way into the locals and by political intrigue became delegates to perpetuate an individual in office despite the fact that the majority did not want the man. . . . These people are dangerously vicious. Any one who goes along with them on the theory that that is the liberal thing to do is a fool. I know because I have been one. It is better to rid the labor movement entirely of these people. They are no good to anyone but Uncle Joe."

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Harold Nicolson, in the London Spectator (May 31) pays a tribute to one of those countries which our curious new semantics barred from the ranks of "peace-loving" and "freedom-loving" nations. "I am grateful to Sweden for many things. I am grateful to her because, when I went up to Stockholm in the dark days of the war, I found light and confidence and faith. I am grateful to her for what she did for our prisoners and for the starving millions of Greece. But, above all, I am grateful to her because she shows us the middle way. For in that wise and lovely land they have discovered the true secret of social democracy; they can teach us how to combine ancient traditions with a new social and economic order; how to achieve public elegance without disparity in private fortunes; how to establish the most detailed social services without crushing personal initiative or individual self-reliance; and how to achieve a common standard of living without degrading life to 'was uns alle bändigt -- das Gemeine' [the habitual which makes us tame]".